

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 14, 2021

E. Joaquin Esquivel  
Chair  
State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chair Esquivel,

We write to reinforce the need for additional efforts to respond to worsening drought conditions and the resulting disastrous consequences facing the state, and in particular, the communities we represent. The Governor's declaration of a drought emergency and planned investment of \$5.1 billion for infrastructure and drought resiliency are welcome developments and should be commended. But this year's dry conditions, high temperatures, and generally low levels of water storage, compared to historical levels, present significant challenges to meeting competing demands for multiple beneficial uses of water around the State. Northern California is experiencing extremely dry conditions this year and most recent projections are that the inflow to our reservoirs in the Sacramento Valley are projected to be at historic lows. This will undoubtedly present serious challenges, as water from Northern California makes up over 75 percent of the State's water supply. It is our hope that attention will be paid to the water needs of all beneficial uses of our state's water resources.

As you know, California's water system is highly interconnected, and decisions made regarding the operations in one part of the state can have cascading effects in other regions of the state. For example, decisions made regarding the management of reservoir releases and the cold-water pool in Shasta Reservoir to manage conditions for chinook salmon in the Sacramento River can result in reduced surface water supplies for meeting Delta water quality standards and for meeting the needs of farmers in the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, forcing them to fallow land and increase groundwater use. This, in turn, has significant negative impacts on already economically disadvantaged communities by further reducing employment opportunities and stressing critically over drafted groundwater basins. The operations of water projects during critically dry years like this one requires striking a reasonable balance between competing beneficial uses of water and weighing the impacts to all downstream water users, human and environmental.

We understand that recently, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Water Resources submitted a plan to the State Water Resources Control Board for the operations of the Central Valley Project and State Water Project during this year. In your review of this plan we encourage you to recognize the importance of the need to achieve a reasonable balance among competing uses, considering all demands being made on the limited water supplies available.

Finally, we want to thank Governor Gavin Newsom for recognizing the need to immediately invest in water supply infrastructure that will make the State more drought resilient. We cannot make it rain or increase California's snowpack this year. However, only two years ago, California experienced one of its wettest winters on record, which came on the heels of one of California's worst droughts in its history. Over the last decade, California has had eight below normal or dry years and two very wet years. This variable hydrology, which is being intensified as a result of climate change, only further reinforces the need to significantly increase investments in water storage and conveyance, so that we can store water in the years when it is available for use during the years where nature fails to provide enough water for all of California's needs.

Reliable water supplies are essential to the public health, ecosystems, and regional economic viability of the Central Valley. We are at a critical moment in California's history. Actions taken now can build resilience for future droughts and provide benefits to California's people and its environment. We look to your leadership to strike a reasonable balance, working with your state and federal partners, to operate the Central Valley Project and State Water Project in a way that avoids unnecessary harm to the communities we represent.

Sincerely,



JIM COSTA  
Member of Congress



JOSH HARDER  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Gavin Newsom, Governor of California  
The Honorable Deb Haaland, Secretary of the Interior